



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Center in Tashkent, Miroslav Jenca

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 16, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes you back, Ambassador Jenca, to the Permanent Council. We are deeply grateful for the fine work that you and the Center have undertaken.

The Center's activities in all three dimensions are of vital importance to promoting security and stability in Uzbekistan. We appreciate in particular the Center's attempts to promote cooperation with the Government of Uzbekistan. Despite the difficult circumstances the Center is facing, you and your capable staff have ensured that useful work continues.

We welcome the Center's projects related to combating terrorism and extremism, and the Center's efforts in helping Uzbekistan comply with its commitments in the political military dimension. We hope the Center's focus on addressing specific requests of the Uzbek government, including the implementation of projects on border security, destruction of "mélange" missile fuel components and upgrading national passports, will be successful.

The Center's work in the economic and environmental sphere is similarly important for Uzbekistan's security and stability. For example, the programs to foster entrepreneurship among women, young people, farmers, and private businessmen directly support a key objective of the OSCE and the Government of Uzbekistan; namely, to promote small and medium enterprise development. We encourage you to continue the Center's activities in this area.

We welcome the center's anti-trafficking activities and its efforts to raise awareness about trafficking among at-risk groups. Thanks to the Center, groups of people most vulnerable to this type of exploitation have been informed about the risks and consequences of illegal migration, the mechanisms of trafficking, as well as ways to prevent and combat trafficking. We regret, however, that the Government of Uzbekistan has not yet given official status to the OSCE-supported interagency working group on trafficking in persons, which has been dormant since the summer of 2005. We welcome the center's efforts to strengthen rule of law, encourage good governance, and ensure the protection of human rights in Uzbekistan.

The United States is eager to support the Center in Tashkent and the Government of Uzbekistan in building democracy, improving respect for human rights, developing civil society, and creating the conditions in which entrepreneurial activity can take root and flourish. However, the Government of Uzbekistan has made OSCE's work in these areas very difficult by hindering the implementation of vital projects and denying accreditation to two newly recruited staff members of the Center. OSCE cannot do the work it has been asked to do with its hands tied behind its back.

We all recognize the vital role that nongovernmental organizations play in the development of modern democratic states. Yet, during the last several months, Uzbekistan's government has harassed numerous NGOs, forced many to close, and has tightened the already severe restrictions on the few continuing to operate. The government of Uzbekistan's recent decisions to close Freedom House and take steps that led to the suspension of the Eurasia Foundation are just the latest moves in the wrong direction.

Similarly, during the past month the Government of Uzbekistan has sentenced several opposition figures and activists to lengthy prison terms. These trials again highlight our serious concerns about investigative and judicial processes in Uzbekistan. When possibilities for peaceful opposition and dissent are foreclosed by a government, only extremists benefit.

The United States also has concerns about the Government of Uzbekistan's efforts to restrict the freedom of media. The Uzbek Government's December 2005 decision to deny accreditation to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is just one disturbing example of this behavior.

We fully agree with Ambassador Jenca's assessment that the uncertainty surrounding the extension of the Center's mandate affects the ability of partners to commit themselves fully to the implementation of the Center's projects. The will of the host country to work with and support the OSCE presence is a critical component of the effectiveness of that presence. Without it, the OSCE is limited in the scope and success of its projects. We understand that the Uzbek government has concerns about the Tashkent Center's activities, and we are willing to discuss with the Government of Uzbekistan and the OSCE ways to improve the Center's effectiveness. We do not think, however, that significantly changing the Center's mandate will improve the Center's ability to promote security and stability. Only by continuing to engage in balanced work in all three dimensions – the political-military, economic-environmental, as well as the human dimension – can the Center effectively promote progress, security and stability in the region.

We would like to thank you again, Ambassador Jenca, and your staff for all your efforts to promote OSCE Principles, which we are all committed to uphold. We of course continue our full support for you and the Tashkent Center's valuable work. We look forward to working with you in the many months and years ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman